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AUTHOR Coulson, John M.
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ABSTRACT

The chief educational information unit in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and the focus for dissemination of information to various agencies is the Department of Educational Information of the Scientific Research Institute of General Sciences, Academy of Pedagogical Sciences (APS). The department services the whole of the USSR by collecting and preparing information on education in the USSR and abroad, organizing and coordinating all the units which comprise the educational information system in the USSR, developing and publishing educational information materials, automating information processes, and identifying and disseminating innovative pedagogical practices. Research reports are received from APS research institutes, ministries of education, and teacher training institutes throughout the USSR. Abstract bibliographies and interpretive materials are prepared based on user interests. Reports of promising educational practices are presented at a series of teacher conferences held first at the district level, then the republic, and finally at the All-Union level. The best teacher reports from each conference are presented at the next, and a few of these are chosen for publication and dissemination throughout the country. Overall the Soviets appear to be following the same developmental steps as United States in building a resource base and a system of access to the literature. (JY)

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Educational Information Dissemination in the USSR: An Informal Report

John M. Coulson
National Institute of Education*

January, 1975

One of the key functions of dissemination systems in education is to make available information about the outcomes of research and development, effective educational practice, and other knowledge for use by educators in improving educational practice. The purpose of this brief paper is to describe some aspects of the Soviet system to disseminate educational information.* More specifically, this short paper describes Department organization and structure; the system's relationship to foreign countries; some methods of dissemination; and the identification of promising educational practices. It concludes with some overall impressions.

The chief educational information unit in the USSR and the focus for dissemination of information to various agencies is the Department of Educational Information of the Scientific Research Institute of General Sciences, Academy of Pedagogical Sciences (APS).

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*The views expressed in this paper do not necessarily represent NIE policy or views. Much of the content for this brief report was obtained from a two hour conversation with Vlas Aransky, Deputy Director, Institute of General Sciences, and Head, Department of Educational Information, Academy of Pedagogical Sciences; G. Mikaberidge, Head, Information on Education in Foreign Countries, Department of Educational Information; and Mrs. V. Mitina, Sector Research Worker, Information on Education in Foreign Countries, Department of Educational Information. Address: Pavla Korchagina, 7, Moscow, USSR. These Soviet representatives were very cooperative and went to great lengths to provide details about their department and its operation.

The interview took place during a trip to the Soviet Union in November, 1974. The issues discussed during the interview were triggered by information presented by Lee G. Burchinal in his chapter in Impressions of Soviet Education: a Second Look, Institute for Education Leadership, 1972.

Significant portions of the interview were taped to help insure accuracy. In addition, organization charts were received and translated into English by an Intourst guide, who was also present during the interview. Despite these efforts, however, the reader is alerted to the authentic but very narrow and limited documentation for the contents of the report. For example, users of information were not interviewed. Of more importance, the author was not able to observe in actual practice what was described to him. Thus, for instance, it was not possible to gather first-hand knowledge of how the flow of educational information actually worked in practice. Clearly, the report represents but a modest continuation attempt to describe the dissemination of educational information in the USSR.

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The Department functions at the All-Union level (cf. Figure 1). It has five objectives:

1) collection and preparation of information on education in the USSR and abroad, especially "Socialist" countries of Eastern Europe (this includes information on foreign departments of educational information);
2) organization and coordination of all the units comprising the educational information system in the USSR;
3) development and publication of educational information materials;
4) mechanization and automation of information processes;
5) identification and dissemination of innovative pedogogical practices.

In keeping with these objectives, the Department is organized into six sectors. These are depicted in Figure 2.

Not all of these sectors are functioning units. The sector on Technical Laboratory is not completely operative, and the sector on Automation and Mechanization is in the planning stages only.

Severe time constraints did not permit the collection of information on the number and kinds of people who staff the various sectors.

Extensive arrangements have been established to acquire comprehensive educational information for dissemination (cf. Figure 3). Research reports and other materials are received from the Academy of Pedagogical Sciences research institutes, ministries of education, and teacher training institutes in all 15 republics. Information on foreign books on education is supplied by State Libraries (republic), such as the Lenin State Library in Moscow.

In addition to being the focus of education/information transfer efforts within the Soviet Union, the Department is taking a leadership position with respect to the "Socialist" countries of Eastern Europe. For instance, from

Poland it hopes to get Polish materials in English on education in Poland. In addition, it plans to set up a cooperative arrangement with information centers in the Eastern bloc countries to publish a common journal of educational information. This year the East Germans took the lead with the USSR in locating and publishing information materials on personality development. It is anticipated that annually each country will take its turn to organize pertinent materials from Eastern bloc countries on a particular topic.

The Department has undertaken an extensive publications effort. Abstracts bibliographies, and interpretive summaries on a wide variety of educational topics are being prepared by the Department's editorial section. This is the way the publications plan for 1975 was prepared: first, user interests were surveyed; then the Department staff conceptualized certain user categories. Next specialized materials (called yearbooks) were prepared for different user groups - for example, policy analysts at the Ministry of Education. These materials were then sent to various groups free of charge and their opinions of the content of the year-book were solicited. The Department intends to continue its studies of users which will form the basis for future publication plans.

Officials in the Department stressed that in addition to publications, other different channels of dissemination are utilized, such as educational televison. Conferences of educators are convened to "spread the innovation."*

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* In response to the question as to how research results are disseminated, the President of the Academy of Pedagogical Sciences, in a large group session, replied that it is the duty of APS "to pay attention to new things." He went on to say that journalists learn of new discoveries in education and publish articles in newspapers and magazines. According to a "natural process," some interested people will adopt new practices while a large number will be disinterested or, at best, reluctant to adopt educational practices.

The Soviets have come up with an interesting response to the problem of the identification of promising educational practices ("outstanding teacher experiences"). Once every three years, a series of teacher conferences are held, first at the district level, then the republic, and finally the All-Union levels to identify the best teacher reports describing outstanding teacher practices in a particular topical area. In 1973 the topic area was educational instruction and upbringing in rural schools. Through a gradual selection process, some 5,000 brief reports were reduced to about 300 which were presented at the All-Union Conference. Specialists from the Academy of Pedagogical Sciences selected the best of these for publication and dissemination throughout the county.

The theme for 1976 is interaction of the family, school, and community.

The Department now has access to a computer (computer parts for a MINSK 32 were packed in boxes lining the hallways of the Department building). How it plans to use this computer is not clear. It is likely that the staff plans to use the computer initially to acquire and process documents into the knowledge base. They seemed uncertain as to how to go about using the computer to answer questions from educators. G. Mikaberidge, the Soviet representative to the International Bureau of Education in Geneva, appeared to be familiar with other countries' use of computers to retrieve information, but, based on their questions as to computer use in the United States, they did not evidence a complete understanding or appreciation of the use of a computer for retrieval of information.

Because of the shortness of the interview, only some general impressions of Department of Educational Information functions can be listed. It would be inappropriate to label them conclusions. General impressions include these:

1. There is a strong commitment at the Department level to the dissemination of educational information. The Head and his colleagues were enthusiastic and dedicated, but mindful of the bureaucratic and financial constraints under which they have to work ("money is money everywhere.") They seemed eager to learn about what other countries are doing, devoting significant resources to the acquisition, processing, translating, and dissemination of foreign literature. They continue to perceive the United States as a "rich" country with expensive computers in abundance.
2. They are struggling with some of the same problems as are technical information specialists in the United States: the identification of quality educational information ("educators sometimes speak too much"); the identification of stable categories of users; the relating of educational information systems in the social or behavioral areas to information systems in science (VINITI - the All-Union Institute for Scientific and Technical Information).
3. Since the report by Burchinal was written, there has been an expansion of the Department, and the use of a third generation computer is contemplated in the immediate future. At the same time, staff are still working on the completion of a thesaurus of educational terms.
4. Anatol Darinsky, Director, Institute of Adult Education, in Leningrad, did not mention any difficulty with the Department of Educational Information in Moscow, an observation made in the IEL report of two years ago. Darinsky saw his information sector "as a part of" the Moscow office, but did not indicate how the two offices interact.

5. Department staff wondered whether the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) Research in Education index could not be arranged by topic and/or by type of article. They indicated annoyance with having to wade through irrelevant materials. They seemed pleased when informed that present plans include the study of provision for partitioning the ERIC file.

6. Overall, the Soviets appear to be following the same developmental steps as did managers of educational information systems in the United States. First, USSR officials established a knowledge or resource base, largely modeled on the information system in science and technology, consisting of research reports, policy papers, descriptions of exemplary teaching practices, and so forth. Their resource base is similar to ERIC, only more centralized. Both systems perform archival functions - a necessary but insufficient condition for making available pertinent educational information on which to base decisions. Managers of both systems discovered that while some educational researchers used the system, few educational practitioners did. So both systems mounted a publications program, including materials which interpret the outcomes of research and practice for teachers, principals, and others. These materials are distributed widely. This is where the Soviets are now. The United States has gone on to the third or more pro-active stage, which consists of efforts to link users with the knowledge base through means relying on person to person communication. It is likely

that eventually the Soviets also will pass on to the stage where assistance is given to the educator to help him interpret and use the information he receives.

Figure 1

Network of Information in Education in the U.S.S.R.

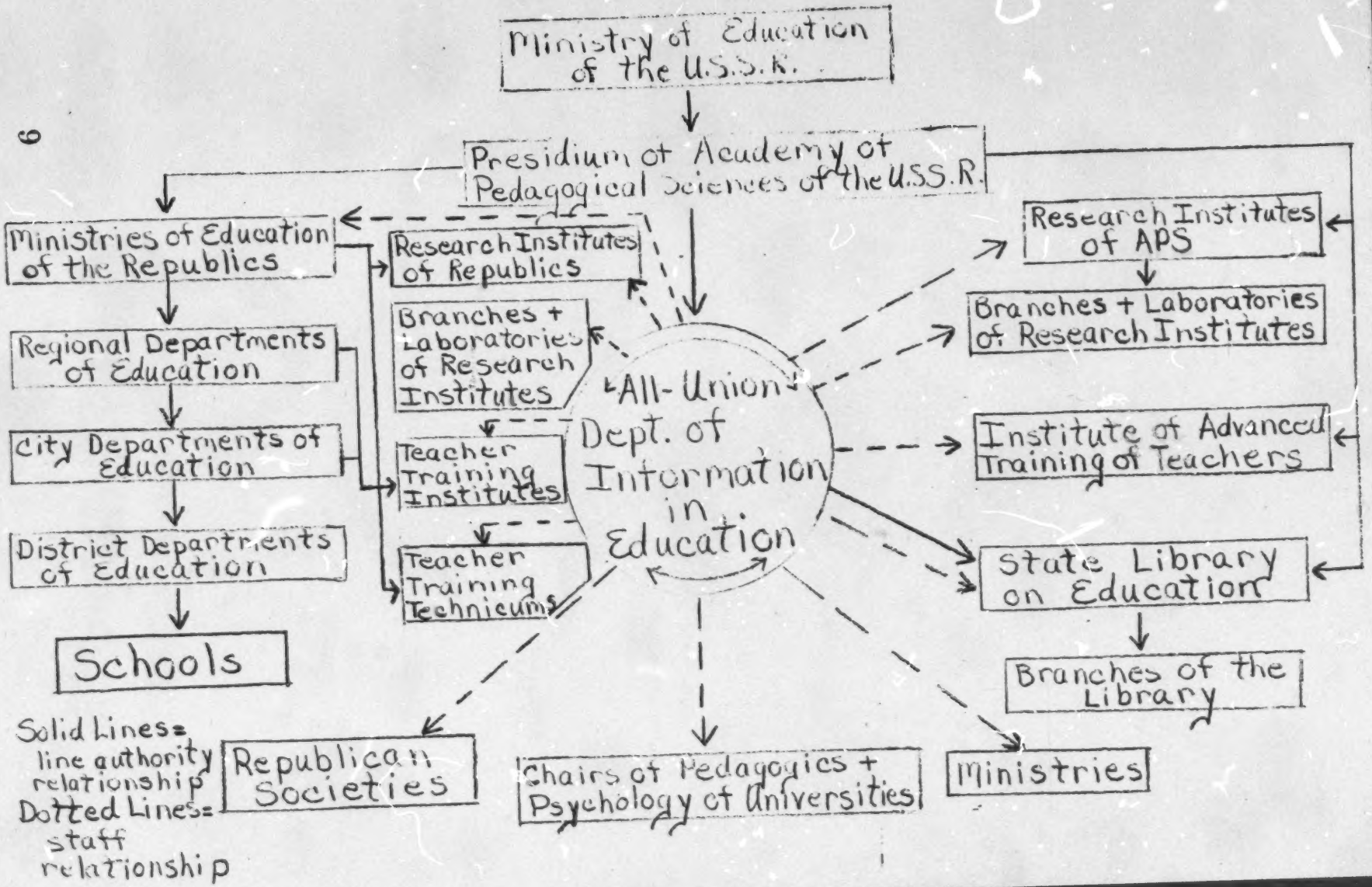

Ministry of Education of the U.S.S.R.
Presidium of Academy of Pedagogical Sciences of the U.S.S.R.
Ministries of Education of the Republics
Research Institutes of Republics
Research Institutes of APS
Regional Departments of Education
Branches + Laboratories of Research Institutes
Branches + Laboratories of Research Institutes
City Departments of Education
All-Union Dept. of Information in Education
Institute of Advanced Training of Teachers
Teacher Training Institutes
District Departments of Education
Teacher Training Technicums
State Library on Education
Schools
Branches of the Library
Solid Lines = line authority relationship
Dotted Lines = staff relationship
Republican Societies
Chairs of Pedagogics + Psychology of Universities
Ministries

Figure 2

Department of Educational Information
(adapted from official organization chart)

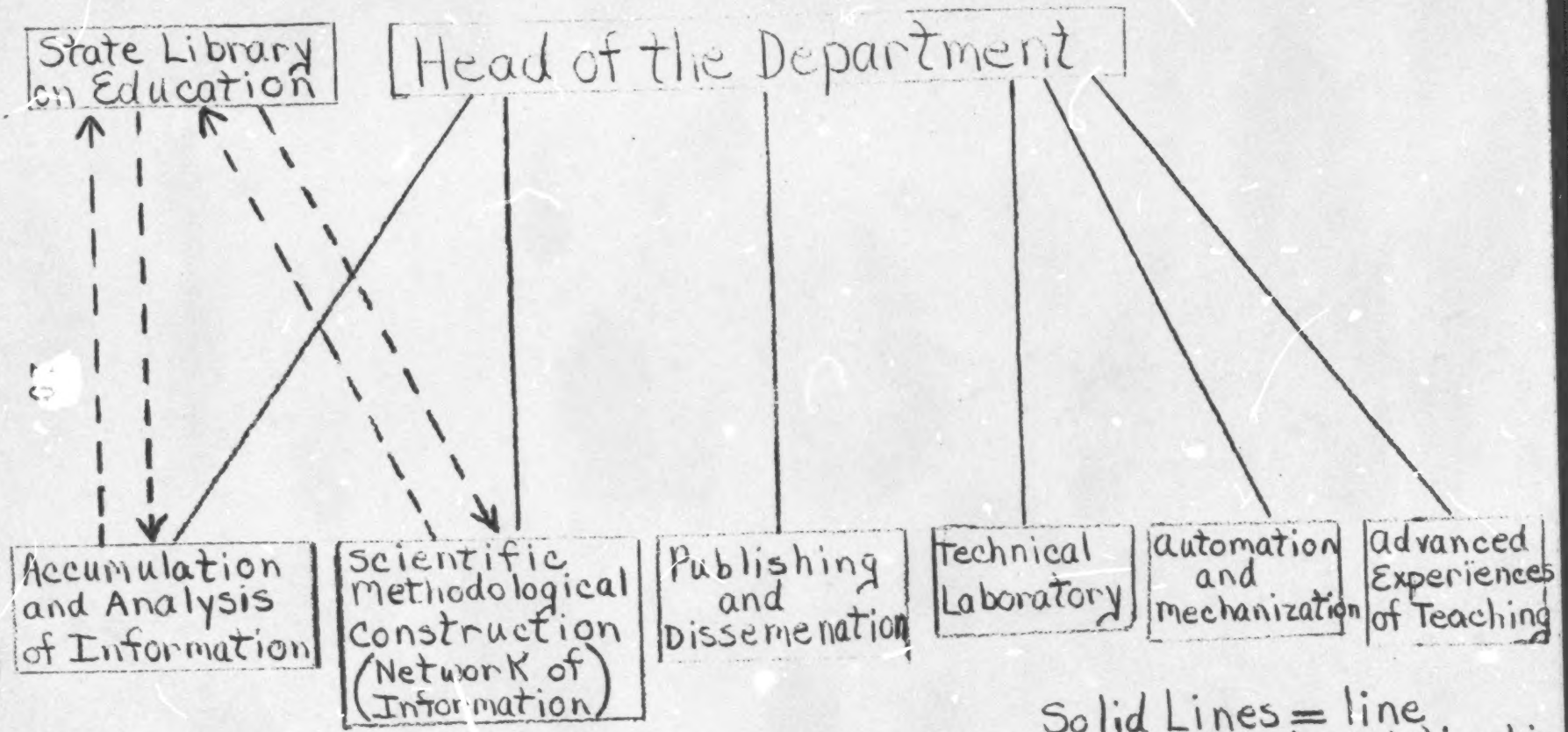
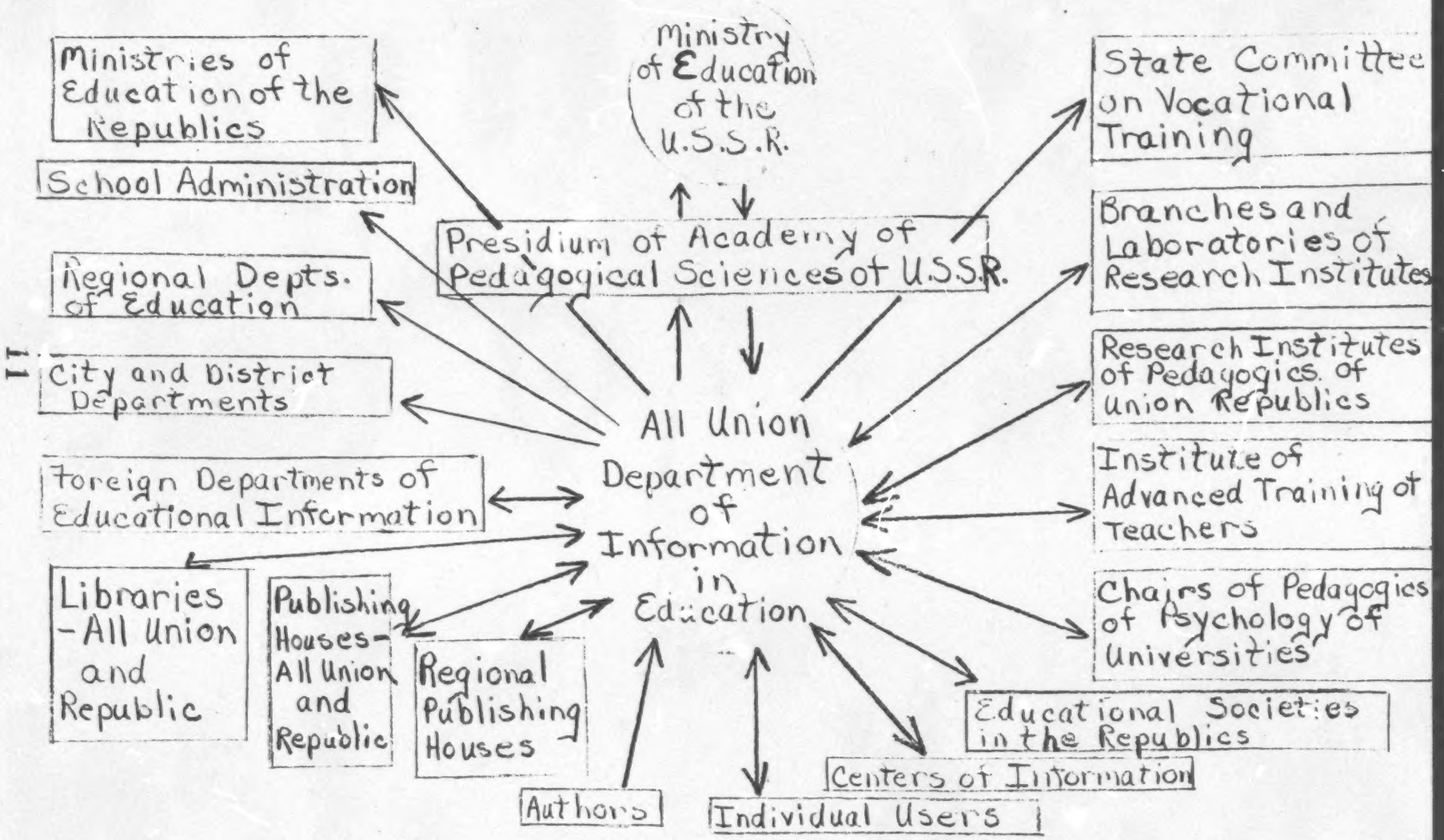

State Library on Education
Head of the Department
Accumulation and Analysis of Information
Scientific Methodological Construction (Network of Information)
Publishing and Dissemination
Technical Laboratory
Automation and mechanization
Advanced Experiences of Teaching
Solid Lines = line authority relationship
Dotted Lines = staff relationship

Figure 3
Flow of Information in Education


Ministry of Education of the U.S.S.R.
Ministries of Education of the Republics
School Administration
Regional Depts. of Education
City and District Departments
Presidium of Academy of Pedagogical Sciences of U.S.S.R.
All Union Department of Information in Education
Foreign Departments of Educational Information
Libraries - All Union and Republic
Publishing Houses - All Union and Republic
Regional Publishing Houses
Authors
Individual Users
Centers of Information
Educational Societies in the Republics
State Committee on Vocational Training
Branches and Laboratories of Research Institutes
Research Institutes of Pedagogics of Union Republics
Institute of Advanced Training of Teachers
Chairs of Pedagogics of Psychology of Universities